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Senate Study Inconclusive On CIA Acts

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After what may be the most exhaustive outside study of an intelligence agency ever undertaken, Senate CIA probers can't decide if the agency's clandestine activities helped or hurt the United States.

One sure thing about the cloak-and-dagger side of the agency did emerge from the study by the Senate Intelligence Committee. That is, that clandestine operations quickly came to dominate the CIA.

The committee has released a history of the CIA produced by one of its staff members, Anne Karalekas. The history details the forerunner of a central point for intelligence collection in the federal government, which was briefly known as the Office of Coordinator of Information.

THE MAN HOLDING that title was William (Wild Bill) Donovan who later headed the storied Office of Strategic Services of World War II. The OSS was the first independent intelligence body and, the committee history points out, provided the organizational precedent for the CIA.

In its examination of nearly three decades of the CIA's history, the committee found, "although the agency was established primarily for the purpose of providing intelligence analysis to senior policymakers, within three years clandestine operations became and continued to be the agency's preeminent activity," the history said.

"The single most important factor in the transformation was policymakers' perception of the Soviet Union as a worldwide threat to United States security. The agency's large-scale clandestine activities have mirrored American foreign policy priorities," it continued.

The committee staff history finds it impossible to determine if all that secret action did any good. There were some successes in covert action, that is the action accomplished what they were supposed to. The question is, should they have been conducted in the first place.

ULTIMATELY, the staff history assesses responsibility for the extent of covert action and abuses of senior policymakers. "The decision-making arrangements at the (National Security Council) level created an environment of blurred accountability which allowed consideration of actions without the constraints of individual responsibility.

"No one in the executive — least of all the president — was required to formally sign off on a decision to implement a covert action program," the history read.

Across town, the situation was no better. "Within Congress a handful of committee members passed on the agency's budget. Some members were informed of most of the CIA's major activities. Others preferred not to be informed. The result was 29 years of acquiescence," the history reads in its section of conclusions.

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